



Smart INVESTMENTSSM IN MINNESOTA'S STUDENTS

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We're All in This Together: *Educational Achievement and Attainment by Minnesotans of Color*

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Minnesota's challenge and opportunity

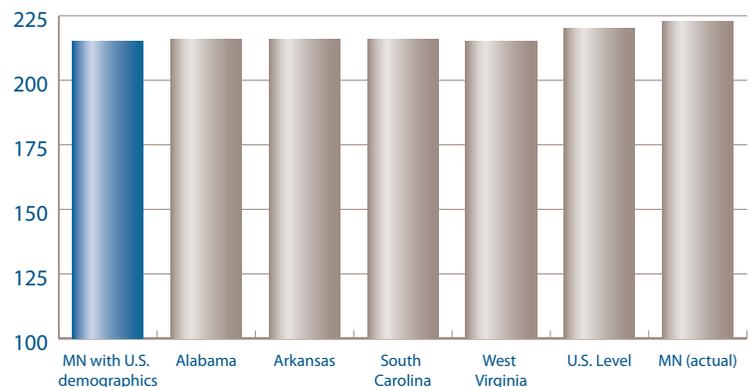
Education drives growth and prosperity in Minnesota. It is a key factor in the success of our state and critical to our economic outlook. But Minnesota's record when it comes to educational achievement and attainment is marred by inequities. Minnesota's students of color have not had the same levels of opportunity and success as the state's White students. And if Minnesota is to depend upon well-educated residents and workers, the state must ensure success for all when it comes to education.

The continuation of Minnesota's lead in education and the payoff for our state's economy and people require real progress by students of color. Minnesota's current educational inequities affect a sizable and growing share of the state's population and in this way adversely affect us all. Consider this:

- Unless action is taken to boost graduation rates for the state's growing population of Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans and American Indians, Minnesota will likely see a decline by 2020 in the share of students completing high school and the share of residents ages 25-34 holding college degrees at the bachelor's level or higher.
- Inequities, unless addressed, will undermine Minnesota's lead in educational achievement. As it stands, if Minnesota had the same racial and ethnic mix as the United States as a whole, the state's overall combined score for White students and students of color on the national 4th grade reading test would drop below the U.S. mark to the same level as Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina and West Virginia.

The challenge is clear but not overwhelming. Data analysis from the Organizing Apprenticeship Project shows that improvements for fewer than 61,000 students of color, out of fewer than 215,000 total, will close the gap with White students on the standardized test for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II. The state needs to move beyond excuses for why gaps exist to action that will narrow and close them.

Inequities hurt the state: If MN looked like the nation, 4th grade reading scores would fall to AL, AR, SC, and WV levels



Source: The 2009 results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and Growth & Justice calculations.



Diverse talent in Minnesota

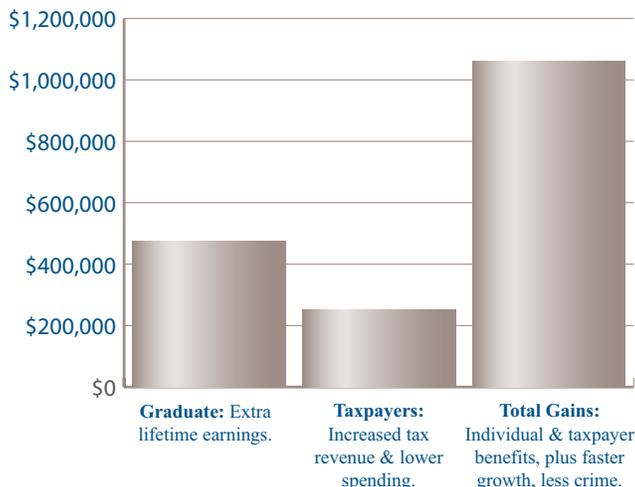
Minnesotans of color and American Indians are a crucial share of the state's overall population and its workforce. Increases by the state's communities of color gave Minnesota a faster population growth rate than all but one Midwestern state from 2000 to 2010. Statewide among all residents, persons of color now account for about 17% of Minnesota's population, up from just more than 6% in 1990. Already, students of color account for more than one in four of the state's students enrolled in school from the pre-kindergarten level through fifth grade.

Educational achievement and attainment matter to both Minnesota's residents and the state

Educational achievement and attainment have a tremendous impact on the well-being of Minnesotans and on the economic strength of our state. It's estimated that total personal income in Minnesota would increase by about \$4 billion annually if all ethnic and racial groups had the same educational attainment levels and earnings as Whites.

Education has a strong and positive effect on individuals. Unemployment and poverty rates are considerably lower for those with higher educations. And earnings increase as educational attainment increases, with the median annual earnings for U.S. workers who have bachelor's degrees at a level almost two and a half times the earnings for workers who didn't finish high school, according to Census estimates for 2009.

Big gains for each additional Minnesota high school graduate



Source: Henry Levin & Clive Belfield, 2007. Dollar levels expressed as present value, using a 3.5% discount rate.

Researchers Henry Levin and Clive Belfield in 2007 calculated that, on average, a Minnesotan who graduates from high school earns \$476,000 more over a lifetime than someone without a high school diploma. What's more, the gains include another \$252,000 in increased tax revenues and lower expenditures on health, welfare and crime-related issues. Adding up these gains, plus expected impacts on state economic growth and other factors, Levin and Belfield estimate that the total benefits from just high school graduation for a Minnesotan amount to more than \$1 million.

High school graduation rates must increase for Minnesotans of color

Minnesota is a national leader when it comes to the share of its population with at least a high school education. More than 90% of all Minnesotans ages 25 and older are high school graduates or the equivalent, compared to just less than 85% for the United States as a whole. But as it stands now, the overall share of students graduating from high school will decline unless Minnesota takes action.

Graduation rates for Minnesotans of color – particularly Blacks and Latinos – are much lower than the rate for Whites. And the high school dropout rates are higher for Minnesotans of color, with the rate for Minnesota's American Indian students at seven times the rate for the state's White students, and the rates for Blacks and Latinos at about four times the White rate, based on data from the federal government for the 2008-09 school year. As communities of color become a larger proportion of the total Minnesota population, they will represent a larger proportion of Minnesota's students. Growth & Justice estimates that unless Minnesota addresses the educational inequities, Minnesotans in the 25-34 age range, as a group, will be relatively less educated in 10 years time than that age group is today.

The state needs more Minnesotans of color graduating from college

As with high school completion, college education is a clear strength for Minnesota, but the share of Minnesotans holding bachelor's degrees is expected to drop over the next decade unless attainment rates increase for Minnesotans of color, according to Growth & Justice estimates. Students of color represent the fastest-growing population segment in the state, but they are not doing as well as their White peers on post-secondary enrollment and completion.

This issue of post-secondary attainment is a fundamental one for Minnesota. Growth & Justice has advocated



strongly for increasing the state's higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020, and we cannot reach this goal unless significantly greater shares of Black, Latino, Asian American and American Indian students complete high school, enroll in college and earn degrees.

Elementary school achievement

Minnesotans are proud that the state's educational achievement scores for elementary students overall exceed those of many other states and the nation as a whole. Growth & Justice analyzed educational achievement patterns for Minnesota's elementary school students using the 2009 tests from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) for 4th and 8th grade reading and math. Research shows that language and math skills are crucial to educational success and future educational attainment.

But breakdowns for Minnesota's achievement scores expose serious warning signs, especially in the critical area of early and proficient reading. The state's Black, Latino and Asian American 4th grade students on average did worse than their counterparts nationally on the 2009 NAEP reading test, and our White and American Indian 4th grade students did no better than their peers nationwide.

A particularly worrisome trend is that while the national average NAEP 4th grade reading scores have increased for Blacks and Latinos – two key and growing demographic groups – Minnesota's average scores for these students have not. Minnesota's average score for White students didn't rise either from 2003 to 2009.

When it comes to 4th grade reading scores, Minnesota may be paying a price for too small an investment in early education. Minnesota lags well behind other states for government-funded preschool education options – initiatives that can have a significant impact on educational achievement for students, especially students of color.

An examination of the 2009 NAEP results not by average scores but by proficiency levels also shows striking disparities for Minnesota's students of color. For example, large proportions of the state's students of color registered below the basic level for the 2009 NAEP 4th grade reading test – 61% for Blacks, 62% for Latinos, 37% for Asian Americans and 57% for American Indians. Of the state's White 4th graders, 22% were below the basic level for reading.

Some argue that Minnesota's reading scores may suffer because the state has a relatively high percentage of students who are English language learners (ELL). Interestingly, however, Minnesota's 2009 NAEP scores for 4th and 8th grade reading would not increase in a statistically

significant way even if the state's percentage of ELL students were to drop from the actual level (7.4%) down to 1%. From these calculations, it seems that the state's higher-than-average percentage of ELL students is not a significant drag on Minnesota's overall NAEP reading scores. It is possible, however, that lower scores by Minnesota's ELL students dampen the average reading scores for some of Minnesota's racial and ethnic groups, something that we cannot explore using the NAEP data available for the state.

And some have argued that Minnesotans of color are more likely to score lower on achievement tests because a greater share of these students live in low-income households and, in general, low-income students score lower on standardized tests. But the Minnesota 2009 NAEP data show that in most cases significant gaps exist between low-income White students and low-income students of color for these math and reading test scores, using eligibility for the nation's free and reduced-price school meal program as a stand-in for income. This suggests that household income levels alone may not explain the gap for students of color.

A Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota

Clearly, Minnesota must rise to the challenge and improve educational achievement and attainment for the state's students of color and American Indian students, even as the state continues to boost success for all. The economic strength of the state and the well-being of all its residents depend upon ending inequities and advancing education for Minnesotans of color.

Progress is both required and possible. We already know many research-based, cost-effective policies and strategies for improving education – policies and strategies of particular importance to students of color. Growth & Justice's 2011 *Smart Investment Agenda for Education in Minnesota* spells out the following evidence-based recommendations and priorities for improving education from birth to higher education, with the goal of increasing the higher education attainment rate to 75% by the year 2020.

- *For children from birth through age 3:* Improve prenatal care and health care in the first years of life; increase visits to at-risk pregnant mothers and families with young children by nurses, social workers, parent educators and other well-trained staff; and expand needs-based high quality child-care from skilled, educated staff in settings with low child-to-teacher ratios.



- *For children from age 4 through grade 3:* Expand high quality, half-day, affordable preschool for more Minnesota children by age 4; use small class sizes for the early education years; improve effective instruction in reading and other critical skills; and increase parent involvement and family support initiatives that encourage partnerships between schools and families.
- *For students in grades 4 through 8:* Provide intensive tutoring assistance targeted to low-performing students; offer quality academic preparation through good instruction, strong curriculum and meaningful assessments of student progress; improve both school-based and out-of-school support efforts that better connect students to teachers, parents and other adults; and initiate in-school programs and reforms aimed at helping students achieve, preventing problems with academic progress, and intervening with students when problems occur.
- *For high school and the transition to college:* Offer rigorous coursework matched with ongoing assessments to ensure progress; allow students to earn college credits while in high school; institute high school reforms and improvement initiatives that establish small learning communities within schools, offer academic support when needed, and better connect teachers with students and schools with parents; hire more high school counselors to reduce Minnesota's very high student-counselor ratio; improve out-of-school support for high school students, including tutoring initiatives, mentoring programs, and efforts to reduce teen pregnancy rates; ramp up concerted, in-school efforts to prevent students from dropping out and to boost graduation rates using proven initiatives to monitor student progress, offer remediation and feedback, build relationships, and link schools to families and students; increase need-based financial aid to make higher education affordable for students with limited means; and expand counseling and academic preparation for college readiness, with a focus on promising, low-income students.

Other groups have made valuable policy recommendations that target educational equity issues, with strong, notable proposals from the [Minnesota Minority Education Partnership](#) and the [Organizing Apprenticeship Project](#).

The greatest return on investment

There is good news when it comes to education. The nation overall and many other states have raised the achievement scores of students of color, so Minnesota can as well. On average, Minnesota's Blacks, Latinos and American Indians score on par with their counterparts nationwide, statistically speaking, for a number of important NAEP tests – 4th grade math and 8th grade reading and math – and the state's White students rank above the national marks for those tests. From a statistical standpoint, Minnesota's gaps between White students and Black, Latino and American Indian students are even with the gaps nationally, not worse, for those same three achievement tests. Minnesota must build on its positives and significantly advance educational achievement and attainment for its students of color.

The greatest return on education investment comes from addressing the greatest disparities in opportunity and achievement. This is true for individual students but also true for gains to the state. Minnesota must make necessary progress on educational achievement and attainment for students of color in particular, something that will advance both individual well-being and the state's economy.

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More information and detail on all the topics in this issue brief, as well as citations for the research, are available in the full Growth & Justice report, at www.growthandjustice.org/SOC_Report

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